

MAINE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT NO. 35

Serving the communities of ELIOT & SOUTH BERWICK

Mary C. Nash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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January 7, 2016

Dear Members of the Marshwood Community,

On Monday, November 23, 2015 one of the high school secretaries thought she was simply passing along a community service opportunity to our students by posting an opportunity to be a volunteer in the Hillary Clinton campaign office as part of their 50 hours of community service requirement. Although this posting was intended to be a helpful information source regarding a community service opportunity, because the posting was made without any context it could have been perceived by some of our parents as a solicitation or a recruitment for a non-school sponsored organization and this is most unfortunate because it was not!

On December 1, 2015 a parent brought his concern about this posting to my attention. I immediately convened an investigation where I first reviewed the Board's policies regarding the acceptable (and prohibited) uses of the district's computers and internet/email services and found that the Board's policy titled Employee Computer and Internet Use Rules are very clear and they strictly prohibit: *"Any use as a forum for communicating by email or any other medium with other school users or outside parties to solicit, proselytize, advocate or communicate the views of an individual or non-school-sponsored organization; to solicit membership in or support of any non-school-sponsored organization; or to raise funds for any non-school sponsored purpose whether profit or not-for-profit."*

At the conclusion of my investigation, I found that the secretary did not intend to recruit or solicit students to work in Hillary Clinton's campaign office but did make a very serious mistake by not providing parents additional information about this community service opportunity so that they could make an informed decision about whether they thought it was or was not an appropriate community service activity for their son/daughter.

I apologized to the two parents who called me about this issue for this error in judgment.

On December 2, 2015 I asked Mr. Mehlhorn to send a letter out the Marshwood High School community clarifying the posting of this community service opportunity. I have attached Mr. Mehlhorn's letter below for your review.

On Tuesday, January 5, 2016 I received a telephone call from Todd Starnes, a reporter from Fox News NYC who stated that he had been contacted by Marshwood parents concerned about this issue and asked me to comment. I told Mr. Starnes the information above and I underscored the fact that the district did not nor has it ever solicited the recruitment of students to work in any political campaign office!

Despite the facts of this case which I relayed to Mr. Starnes on January 7th, he posted an article on Fox News' website titled: *Public School Recruits Students To Work for Hillary Clinton Campaign.*

Another Fox News reporter, Dennis Murphy, an Associate Producer for The Kelly File on Fox News, subsequently contacted the district on January 7th and I responded to his request for comment on this issue.

My response to both Mr. Starnes and to Mr. Murphy underscored the following four key points:

1. The posting of a volunteer position in Hillary Clinton's campaign office as a community service opportunity was not an endorsement of any political party or candidate.
2. The sharing of the information about a volunteer position in Hillary Clinton's campaign office last November was intended to communicate an opportunity for community service and did not encourage, persuade or recruit any student for this opportunity.
3. The district strictly prohibits the endorsement of any political party or candidate in the Board's policy: *Employee Computer and Internet Use Rules* [GCSA-R].
4. The Board has established a long-standing policy around employee computer and internet use rules and it was followed.

Finally, the posting of the community service opportunity as a volunteer in Hillary Clinton's campaign was a mistake on the part of a secretary at our high school in that she did not provide our students' parents with additional information regarding this community service opportunity when she posted it last November so that they could make an informed decision about whether they thought it was or was not an appropriate community service activity for their son/daughter. It was not a recruitment or solicitation or endorsement for any political party or candidate. Indeed, other candidates and political parties have had their campaign office's volunteer positions posted by the district in the past as community service opportunities. The mistake here was not providing parents with additional information with this posting so that they could make an informed decision on behalf of their son/daughter regarding this opportunity and I apologize to our community for that error in judgment. The district has included on the Guidance Department portal of our website the following information:

Marshwood High School recognizes the educational value of connecting students with their community through volunteering their service. The school receives information from many sources seeking students to engage in many different community service activities and efforts. By passing on this information to students and parents, the school should never be perceived as recruiting, soliciting or advocating the views of any non-school organization. It is expected that parents and students will converse with regard to any community service opportunity to determine the appropriateness of these opportunities for their son/daughter in light of the educational value the particular experience will provide.

It is my hope that this information will underscore the importance of our students' parents' role in evaluating whether particular community service opportunities are appropriate for their son/daughter.

Sincerely,



Mary Nash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

CHRISTOPHER STAUFFER
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

December 2, 2015

Dear Parents, Students and Guardians,

Recently, students received a notice of a community service opportunity to volunteer as an intern on Hillary Clinton's political campaign in New Hampshire. In general, all staff must refrain from sending out any solicitations supporting any non-school organization.

There is no doubt that more information could have been presented in this particular notification to clarify that the school was simply passing on information of an opportunity that may be used to meet the community service requirement for graduation. It is also important to note, with any notices, students should converse with their parents/guardians to determine if the opportunity is of interest.

The school receives information from many sources seeking students to engage in many different activities and efforts. The school filters these requests on the basis of whether they may benefit a student's education. Fifty hours of community service is required for all students to receive a Marshwood diploma. The school only passes on community service opportunities that would satisfy our graduation requirements. Some of these acceptable community service opportunities may involve and support religious, military, political, and social service organizations. However, the school by passing on such information, should never be perceived as recruiting, soliciting, or advocating the views of any non-school sponsored organization.

We appreciate those who have expressed concern and hope that it is understood that our intentions are in the best interest of our students' learning and not any other non-school organization.

Sincerely,



Paul Mehlhorn

Principal